

Highlights from the 2009 Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference

February 8-11, 2009

Seattle, Washington, USA

Environment Canada the Puget Sound Partnership (Washington State agency) co-hosted the 9th biennial Puget Sound Georgia Basin (PSGB) Ecosystem Conference in Seattle, February 8-11, 2009.

The Ecosystem Conference series has been recognized by stakeholders as the pre-eminent interdisciplinary research conference focussed on the Puget Sound Georgia Basin region.

The conference draws scientists, First Nations and Tribal government representatives, resource managers, community leaders, policy makers, educators and students together to share scientific information concerning the condition and management of the shared Puget Sound Georgia Basin region.

The 2009 Conference subtitle was “The Future of the Salish Sea: A Call to Action!”. The conference objectives, built through a visioning process in June 2008 with the conference Advisory Committee, were to:

1. To promote a sense of place the Salish Sea, irrespective of political borders;
2. To **INFORM** participants about current scientific research and management techniques in the Salish Sea and to **MOTIVATE** participants to **ENGAGE** in needed research and actions;
3. To foster collaboration and understanding between scientists and policy makers
4. To transfer knowledge about successes and challenges of ecosystem management actions; and
5. To identify priority research and management approaches and foster a commitment to action.

The conference sub-themes, which shaped the program, were:

- Air Quality and Climate Change
- Ecosystem Management Strategies and Techniques
- Habitat, Land Use, and Species
- Marine and Freshwater Resources

A Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the Puget Sound Partnership and Environment Canada detailed the financial and program responsibilities of the two parties. Through this MoA, Environment Canada agreed to contribute up to \$50,000 (CDN) plus in-kind support for the conference. The Puget Sound Partnership also agreed to contribute \$50,000 (USD) plus in-kind support. Each agency also nominated a conference co-chair to steer the design and delivery of the conference.

With respect to financial success and attendance, the organizers significantly exceeded their expectations. This year, the conference drew close to 1,200 participants (versus 920 participants in 2007) and had a significant surplus (over \$100,000 USD). This surplus was a direct result of increased registration, co-sponsorships that exceeded expectations, increased support from co-hosts and an increase in targeted support. Funds will be held in an isolated account through the Puget Sound Partnership and will be used to secure a venue for the 2011 conference, provide

scholarships to the 2011 event, and increased financial security to co-hosts as they move forward with the event.

Key Statistics

1,179 people over three and a half days

259 oral presentations

156 posters

43 concurrent sessions

4 plenary sessions

96% of evaluation respondents said they would attend the conference again

A series of “off-program elements”, including a reception at the Seattle Aquarium, a series of regional tours, a poster gala, an artists’ reception and an environmental film festival, were organized for the benefit of conference delegates.

Delegates consistently remarked on the energy in the hallways, the quality of the presentations and discussion, and the value inherent in being able to interact with colleagues and co-delegates from diverse fields on both sides of the Canada/United States border. Also, organizers of the 2009 conference placed particular emphasis on engaging and partnering with Coast Salish Tribes and Nations in the design and delivery of the conference.

The Puget Sound Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conference is extremely valuable as a locus of information sharing, partnership development, cross-border dialogue, and communication across sectors. Both Environment Canada and the Puget Sound Partnership are committed to seeing the event continue, as it develops into a strong model for sharing science, informing policy, and establishing productive relationships.